Staff Integration for Large-Scale Combat Operations

Transitioning Integrating Cells from Garrison to Warfighting

Major Michael Manougian

Leaders should scrutinize their staff integrating cells to ensure required functional staff representation is present. Specifically, leaders need to look at their Current Operations (CUOPS), Future Operations (FUOPS), and Plans (PLANS) integrating cells.[1] The Mission Command Training Program found a common trend: divisions lack representation from all warfighting functions within their FUOPS cells. The 1st Armored Division (1AD) exemplified this trend during Warfighter Exercise (WFX) 25-01, executing the exercise with a garrison FUOPS and PLANS cell structure that lacked full integration. This article examines why divisions fall into the trap of neglecting FUOPS and PLANS integration, and how they can overcome this challenge.

Doctrine partly contributes to divisions not having all warfighting functions represented in the FUOPS and PLANS cells. FM 6-0 describes how the three integrating cells require inputs from all warfighting functions and staff sections. Figure 8-3 from FM 6-0 visually depicts this with the CUOPS, FUOPS, and PLANS integrating cells overlapping with all the functional cells and staff sections.[2] However, FM 6-0 differs in articulating how the integrating cells get inputs from all functional cells and staff sections. For current operations, FM 6-0 is explicit in that the Current Operations Integration Cell (COIC) has representation across all functional cells and staff sections through physical presence since “all staff sections are represented either permanently or on call in the COIC.”[3] Effectively, the COIC is doctrinally manned with every warfighting function enabling rapid integration across warfighting functions and staff sections.

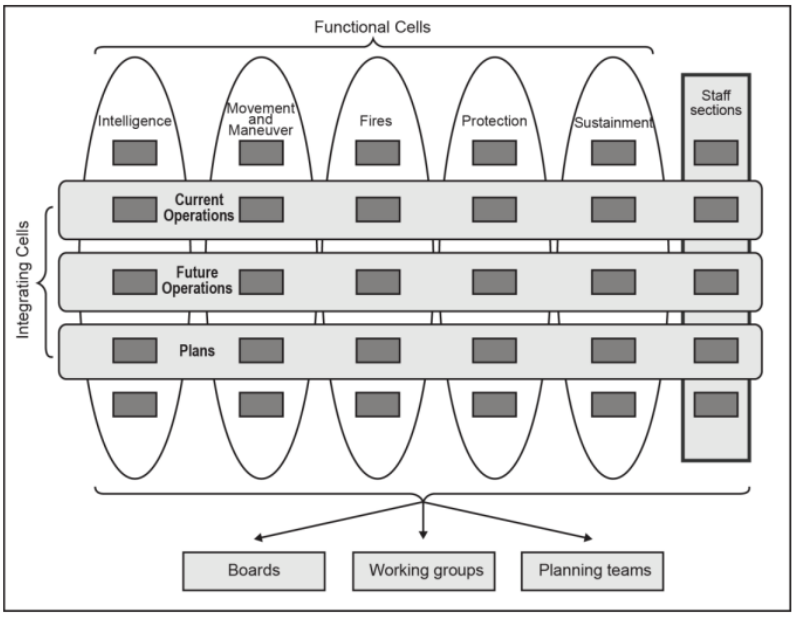

Figure 1: Cross-Functional Staff Integration

FM 6-0 clearly defines the integration of the CUOPS cell but remains vague on the (FUOPS) and (PLANS) cells, implying rather than explicitly stating the integration process. The manual merely states that all staff sections assist FUOPS "as required," offering no concrete guidance on integrating all warfighting functions.[4] Consequently, these cells often resort to boards, working groups, and planning teams to gather input from various warfighting functions instead of achieving true physical integration. While

planning teams are crucial for FUOPS and PLANS cell functionality, their temporary nature ("dissolving on completion of their assigned tasks") hinders sustained future operations and plans integration.[5] This doctrinal ambiguity helps explain the common challenge divisions face in ensuring representation from all warfighting functions within their FUOPS and PLANS cells, as shown by 1AD's recent Warfighter experience.

During 1AD's recent exercise, the FUOPS and PLANS cells relied on ad-hoc planning teams and daily synchronization meetings to achieve cross-functional integration, as outlined in FM 6-0. While these planning teams achieved some success, they struggled to maintain continuous integration, especially in a fluid, dynamic operational environment demanding rapid decision-making and synchronization process (RDSP). This ad-hoc approach exposed two key risks stemming from the lack of permanent representation from each warfighting function within the integrating cells. First, the G35 and G5 wasted valuable time and efficiency hastily assembling impromptu planning teams with representatives from across the warfighting functions. Second, the cells often made hasty decisions and plans without the benefit of input and integration from the broader staff.

Despite lacking full representation from all warfighting functions, both the 1AD FUOPS and PLANS cells achieved a degree of permanent integration with one or two other warfighting functions. For instance, the G35, working within the Division main command post (CP)'s fires cell, worked near the division targeting officer. This naturally fostered strong integration between the G35's planning efforts and fire support, but not necessarily with other warfighting functions, sometimes resulting in maneuver- and fires-centric plans. Similarly, the G5 section received help from a dedicated intelligence officer and a sustainment planner stationed at the rear command post (RCP). The sustainment planner proved particularly valuable in assessing the sustainability of plans and ensured parallel planning with the RCP, a necessity due to the extended lead times inherent in sustainment operations. This example highlights the inherent value of permanently embedding representatives from other warfighting functions within FUOPs and PLANS cells.

1AD's experience highlights a critical need: divisions must prioritize the integration of all warfighting functions within their FUOPS and PLANS cells, moving away from the FM 6-0 model of relying on ad-hoc planning teams. The speed and fluidity of large-scale combat operations demand a more integrated approach. While some leaders might express concerns about manpower, arguing that they lack sufficient personnel to achieve this level of integration, this concern should not hinder progress. Indeed, 1AD's recent experience illustrates this challenge: despite the G4's desire to embed sustainment planners within the COIC, FUOPS, and PLANS cells, they could only spare one for the PLANS cell. This underscores the very real challenge of limited personnel when striving for broader representation of warfighting functions. However, leaders can overcome this obstacle by taking a proactive approach, carefully assessing and identifying individuals who can effectively represent their respective warfighting functions within the FUOPS and PLANS cells.

Leaders often mistakenly believe that only majors or officer-planners can effectively staff integrating cells. This misconception artificially limits the pool of available personnel and likely contributes to the doctrinal guidance of permanently representing only a few warfighting functions within FUOPS and PLANS cells. However, these cells don't require majors or even commissioned officers. The G35 and G5 shops already possess ample understanding of formal planning processes thanks to assigned majors. What these cells truly need is subject matter expertise, a role that noncommissioned officers and warrant officers can readily fill. For example, during 1AD's Warfighter exercise, the Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) assigned a Chief Warrant Officer—an Apache Pilot—as a liaison officer to the Division Main CP. This individual ultimately spent most of his time with the G35 officers at the future operations cell, contributing to planning teams and working groups. His subject matter expertise and ability to clearly communicate the CAB's daily availability proved invaluable to the FUOPS cell, enabling them to seamlessly integrate the CAB into the maneuver plan and effectively plan air assault operations.

Emulating this approach, other warfighting functions can embed noncommissioned officers or warrant officers within the FUOPS and PLANS cells. These subject matter experts can contribute significantly to planning, proactively finding friction points and opportunities from their unique perspectives, and enriching plans with insights derived from their extensive experience. Moreover, by embedding representatives within FUOPS and PLANS, warfighting functions can enhance parallel planning across functional cells. For example, an engineer assigned to FUOPS can predict potential transitions from offensive to defensive operations, providing early warnings to the protection cell. This early notification allows for smoother planning of asset movement and prioritization of survivability efforts. This approach not only addresses manning concerns but also transforms these representatives into force multipliers. Their presence within the integrating cells fosters increased synchronization and shared awareness, reducing the overall demand on functional cells and other staff sections.

Additionally, to overcome manning challenges, a couple of warfighting functions or staff sections can be permanently organized with the FUOPs or PLANS cell and available as needed. The best example is the sustainment planner. The longer lead time on many sustainment plans naturally makes a sustainment planner more effective in PLANS vs. FUOPS. Figure 2 depicts a way to integrate the FUOPS and PLANS through applying lessons from 1AD’s WFX 25-01 and manning. Both cells retain their Officer in Charge (OIC) and four majors that reside in the garrison structure of the G35 and G5 shops. Each cell is manned with NCO representatives from the command and control and protection warfighting functions. For intelligence, the PLANS would have a dedicated intelligence planner while FUOPS would have an intelligence representative in the position of a warrant officer. Due to targeting being planned mostly within the FUOPS horizon, the FUOPS would have a major as the dedicated fires planner while PLANS would have a fires representative in the form of a warrant officer. To address manning shortages there is one warrant officer aviation planner in the FUOPS to support targeting and one sustainment planner in the PLANS. These planners would then be available to assist the other cell as needed.

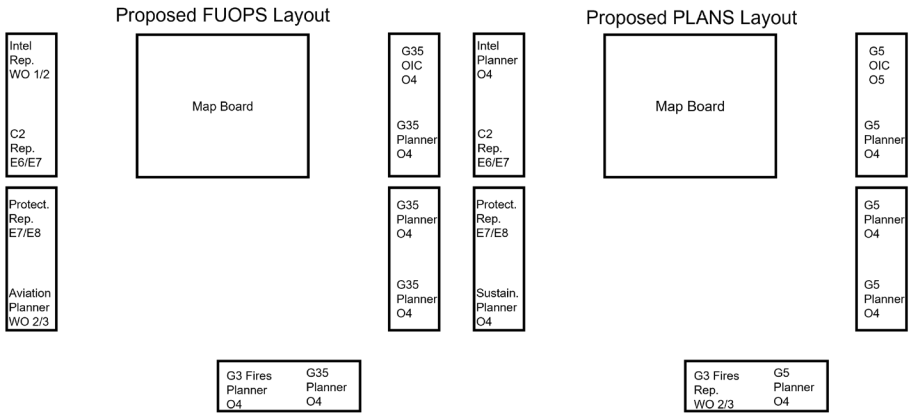

Figure 2: Proposed FUOPS and PLANS

In conclusion, the current approach to FUOPS and PLANS cell integration within divisions is insufficient for the complexities of large-scale combat operations. As 1AD's experience demonstrates, relying solely on ad-hoc teams and limited functional representation risks disjointed planning and delayed decision-making—a potential recipe for failure in a dynamic battlespace. By embracing a more inclusive staffing model that leverages the expertise of NCOs and Warrant Officers, divisions can ensure robust integration across all warfighting functions. This practical shift in approach will enable more agile, synchronized, and ultimately successful operations in the future.

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[1] U.S. Army Combined Arms Center. *Mission Command Training in Large-Scale Combat Operation: Key Observations FY23.* Fort Leavenworth: Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2024. Pg 7
[2] Headquarters, Department of the Army. *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*. Field Manual 6-0. Fort Belvoir, VA: Army Publishing Directorate, 2022. Pg 8-6
[3] Field Manual 6-0. Pg 8-6
[4] Field Manual 6-0. Pg 8-5
[5] Field Manual 6-0. Pg 8-7

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